

CANADIAN-CARIBBEAN ARTS NETWORK
in association with
ALUNA THEATRE and BCURRENT PERFORMING ARTS Co.
presents

DANSE MACABRE

Written & Directed by Rhoma Spencer

DIGITAL
PROGRAM



Canadian Pride.
Caribbean Vibe

TORONTO
FRINGE
FESTIVAL

PLAYWRIGHT/DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The audacity of bodies across the world defying the SIQ-Separate, Isolate, Quarantine mandate to take to the asphalt in solidarity with Black lives was staggering. Yet it was the image of Japanese protesters in Tokyo, chanting "Black Lives Matter" during the wake of the George Floyd protests, that stopped me in my tracks. That moment became the ignition point for Danse Macabre.

What is this cry: Black Lives Matter. What is the ideology beneath the phrase? At a time when the counter-cry of "All Lives Matter" attempted to dilute its urgency, I found myself questioning how deeply this movement was truly understood.

What better way to excavate this tension than through the Carnival.

Carnival has always been our mirror and our weapon. Through mas and calypso, we confront power, mock injustice, and speak the unspeakable. No! It's not just a big 'Parday' of tits and derrière, beads and feathers. In Danse Macabre, the costume becomes the site of truth-telling, resistance, memory and reckoning. This is the axis on which the play turns.

From the violent cultural amputation of Africa, the radical uprising of the Haitian Revolution, to the fire and defiance of the Canboulay Riots, Black bodies have always had to dance and fight their way into being.

The public execution of George Floyd forced the world to bear witness. It offered a moment of reckoning, but not resolution. Understandably, we are no longer where we were. However, we exist now on a perceived larger plantation with acres of awareness; where visibility does not equal freedom, and where the performance of justice is still under scrutiny.

Suffice it to say then, business as usual is no longer possible.

-Rhoma Akosua Spencer, MFA

PLAY SYNOPSIS

Danse Macabre follows Cisco, a queer Trini-Canadian Carnival costume designer whose uncompromising artistic vision drives her to create a mas rooted in the buried histories of the Black diaspora. However, it is being portrayed by a Trinidad French Creole descendant. What begins as a bold creative act becomes a spiritual and psychological unravelling, as the costume invokes ancestral memory—from the violent rupture of enslavement in Africa, through centuries of resistance, to the catalytic fire of the Haitian Revolution.



NOTE:

Keira Marie's portrayal of Frame is an embodiment of the costume being built. It is an extension of Cisco's imagination and her conscience. Inspired by the Egungun, an ancestral masquerade from the Yoruba nation. A living presence of the dead among the living.

CREDITS

CAST

King Cosmos
'Magic'

Uche Ama
'Cisco'

Keira Marie Forde
'Frame'

Thomas Fournier
'Marc'

Theresa Gomes
'Tantie'

Shelby Mwambu
'Tantrum'

Derek Thorne
Percussionist

CREATIVE TEAM

Rhoma Spencer
Playwright / Director

Stephen D. Hankey
Movement Director

Candice Dixon
Costume/Props Designer

Derek Thorne
Sound Designer

Trevor Schwellnus
Set/Lighting/Projections Designer

Eugene Williams
Dramaturgy

daniel jelani ellis
Dramaturgy

PRODUCTION TEAM

Sashoya Simpson
Producer / Social Media

Laura Baxter
Stage Manager

Sofia Di Cicco
Assistant Stage Manager

Mitzi Benjamin Allen
Media/Marketing Manager

Howard Allen
Videography

Tiku Romello Fisher
Photography

Rhoma Spencer
Social Media

This is a Canadian Actors' Equity Association production under the Festival Policy

CAST & TEAM BIOGRAPHIES



KING COSMOS

Henry Gomez, known as King Cosmos, is a veteran actor, musician, educator, and two-time Canada Calypso Monarch. A member of ACTRA and Actors' Equity, he returns to C-CAN after originating the role of Spike in *Queen of the Road*. He is delighted to bring Magic to life in *Danse Macabre*.



UCHE AMA

Uche Ama is a Black queer theatre artist, vocalist, writer, director, and three-time Dora Award-nominated performer. An alumnus of the Broadway Theatre Project, Uche has appeared in *21 Black Futures*, *Obeah Opera*, and *Sweeter*, and is dedicated to creating bold, thought-provoking work that inspires dialogue and exploration.



KEIRA MARIE FORDE

Keira Marie Forde (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist and Artistic Producer of Community Engagement at Toes for Dance. Recent credits include the solo show *No More News for Nancy* (Rendezvous with Madness Festival) and *The Sankofa Trilogy* (Watah Theatre/The Theatre Centre). Keira currently serves as Producer of the Paprika Festival.



THOMAS FOURNIER

Originally from Kelowna, British Columbia, Thomas Fournier is a Toronto-based actor and graduate of Toronto Metropolitan University's BFA Acting program. His credits include *Sweeney Todd* (Horrorshow Productions), *The Bridges of Madison County* (Bowtie Productions), and *Jim Watts: Girl Reporter* (4th Line Theatre). He thanks his friends and family for their unwavering support.

CAST & TEAM BIOGRAPHIES



THERESA GOMES

Born in Trinidad, Theresa Gomes has been performing since childhood and has built a distinguished career as both an actor and singer. A longtime member of La Petite Musicale of Toronto, she has appeared in productions including *Natrinity*, *Simi Dimi*, *The Crucible*, and *Master of Carnival*. Theresa is delighted to return to the stage as Tantie in *Danse Macabre*.



SHELBY MWAMBU

Shelby Mwambu is an Ugandan-Canadian emerging artist based in Toronto. Grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with such talented Black artists, they are passionate about storytelling that entertains and inspires. Shelby is committed to creating work that celebrates and explores their gender identity, ethnicity, and queerness.



DEREK THORNE

Derek Thorne is an acclaimed Toronto-based percussionist, composer, and collaborator whose work spans theatre, dance, education, and world music. He has performed internationally with artists including Calypso Rose, David Rudder, Kobo Town, and Ballet Creole, bringing a distinctive and versatile musical voice to every project.



RHOMA SPENCER

Rhoma Spencer is an acclaimed playwright, director, actor, and Artistic Director of Canadian-Caribbean Arts Network. A Dora Award winner and nominee, her credits include *House of Bernarda Alba*, *Solitudes*, *Queen of the Road*, *Scarborough*, and *Deep Blue*. Since 2001, she has been a leading voice in Caribbean theatre in Canada.

CAST & TEAM BIOGRAPHIES



SASHOYA SIMPSON

Sashoya Simpson is an award-winning Afro-Jamaican producer, writer, storyteller, and cultural leader. Founder of The Walking Griot collective, she creates work rooted in Caribbean knowledge systems and Black storytelling. Her play *LULU* won the 2025 Toronto Fringe Patron's Pick Award, and she currently serves as Associate Artistic Director of Watah Theatre.



STEPHEN D. HANKEY

Stephen D. Hankey is a Trinidad and Tobago-born dancer, choreographer, educator, and Artistic Director of Island Reflections Dance Theatre. A founding member of the National Dance Theatre Company of Trinidad and Tobago, he is dedicated to preserving and advancing traditional Caribbean dance and cultural expression.



CANDICE DIXON

Candice Dixon is a Toronto-based costume designer and Creative Director of SugaCayne. A leader in Caribbean Carnival arts, she is known for pioneering innovative costume design that blends traditional mas with emerging technologies. Her work has been featured by major media outlets and cultural institutions across Canada.



TREVOR SCHWELLNUS

Trevor Schwellnus is a Toronto-based scenographer specializing in set, lighting, and projection design. A six-time Dora Award winner, he has collaborated with leading theatre and dance companies across Canada. His work explores the intersection of design, dramaturgy, and cross-cultural storytelling.

CAST & TEAM BIOGRAPHIES



LAURA BAXTER

Laura Baxter is an accomplished stage manager whose credits include *Soulpepper*, *Obsidian Theatre*, *Canadian Stage*, *Nightwood*, *Tarragon Theatre*, and *Theatre Passe Muraille*. A graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada and member of CAEA, she brings extensive experience to productions across the country.



SOFIA DI CICCICO

Sofia Di Cicco is a theatre production professional and Toronto Metropolitan University graduate. Returning to Fringe for her fifth season, her recent credits include *The Sankofa Trilogy*, *Jack and the BeansTalk*, and *Poz*. She also works as a freelance lighting designer and theatre administrator.



MITZI BENJAMIN ALLEN

Mitzi Benjamin Allen is an award-winning film and television producer, broadcast journalist, and Managing Director of HAMA Inc. With a career spanning more than three decades, she was the first Black reporter at CFTO-TV in Toronto. Allen has produced acclaimed films, television series, and documentaries, earning recognition for her contributions to media, arts, and cultural development.

GLOSSARY

| | |
|---|--|
| Raise your banners ----- | To expose |
| Goat mouth ----- | Casting bad luck |
| Jumbie ----- | Spirit |
| Massa Day ----- | Slavery Days |
| Sah ----- | Taken from Massa/Master |
| Ole Olambe ----- | Traditional Devil Mas Chant |
| Pappyshow ----- | A mockery or a puppet show |
| Ibeji ----- | Sacred Twins in Yoruba Cosmology |
| Robber Talk ----- | The narrative of the Midnight Robber masquerade |
| Hark ----- | Midnight Robber talk call to command |
| Mea Culpa ----- | My fault. I am to blame |
| Fraid ----- | Afraid |
| Golden Grove ----- | Sugar cane plantation in Trinidad |
| Better cock than you crow ----- | Heard it before |
| One day congotay ----- | In time to come |
| Vaval ----- | Symbolic King of Carnival effigy burnt on Ash Wednesday |
| Crapeaud ----- | Frog |
| Papayo ----- | Papa God |
| Cobbeau ----- | Vulture |
| Comess ----- | Confusion |
| Kambule ----- | Reference to the procession leading up to the Canboulay riot. Used here as a call to action. |
| Flambeau ----- | A flaming Torch |
| A Fus ----- | To amplify and turn up a message (from the French A Force) |
| Cannes Brûlées ----- | Burnt cane |
| Petit Belle Lilly, Zigalee, Alice ----- | Famous Jamettes. |
| Sugar, Fisheye | |
| Jamettes ----- | The post-emancipated Africans of the lowest class of society. |
| Fire one ----- | Take a drink |

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